

Mc Konkey Ferry House
Washington Crossing, Mercer County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

Mc Konkey Ferry House
Washington Crossing, Mercer County, New Jersey

Owner: Division of Forests and Parks, State of New Jersey

Date of Erection: Middle eighteenth century or earlier

Architect:

Builder: A Johnson

Present condition: Good

Number of stories: One and one-half

Materials of construction: Foundation - local stone

Exterior - frame, shingle on
the north and south and siding
on the east and west

Interior walls - plaster;
fire place end of tap room and
kitchen panel; remaining walls
wainscoted to the height of
about 2 feet 8 inches, adzed
beams are exposed in the ceiling

Flooring-new, random width
boards similar to original; the
doors are six panels or "Early
Christian" type

Roof - shingles, gambrel

Historical Data:

William Mc Konkey, the man who ferried Washington
across the Delaware on Christmas night 1776, was the owner
of the land and the franchise of Mc Konkey's Ferry, now

Washington Crossing. The most important incident connected with the ferry house is the fact that it was a temporary hospital on that Christmas night and sheltered the sick and disabled soldiers until the army returned from Trenton. Washington gave his personal thanks to the Mc Konkeys when he returned from Trenton and took breakfast with them the next morning. In after years Mary Mc Konkey, who was a little girl in 1776, never failed to mention how on his departure General Washington stooped and kissed her good-bye.

The historic incident that is connected with this house can best be told by a quotation from the diary of an officer on General Washington's staff.

"Christmas 6 P.M. The regiments have had their evening parade, but instead of returning to their quarters, they marched on toward the ferry. It is fearfully cold and raw and the snow storm setting in. The wind is northeast and beats in the face of the men. It will be a terrible night for the soldiers who have no shoes. Some of them have tied old rags around their feet; others are barefoot, but I have not heard a man complain. They are ready to suffer any hardship and die rather than give up their liberty. I have just copied the order for marching. Both divisions are to go from the ferry to Bear Tavern, two miles. They will separate there; Washington will accompany Greene's Division with a part of the artillery down the Pennington Road; Sullivan and the rest of the artillery will take the River Road.

"December 26 3 A.M. I am writing in the ferry house. The troops are all over and the boats have gone back for the artillery. We are three hours behind the set time. Glover's men have had a hard time to force the boats through the floating ice with the snow drifting in their faces. I have never seen Washington so determined as he is now. He stands on the bank of the river wrapped in his cloak, superintending the landing

of his troops. He is calm and collected, but very determined. The storm is changing to sleet and cuts like a knife. The last cannon is being landed."

The house is changed but little since it was built; a porch has been added since. The long scalloped shingles, huge fireplace, panel walls, the interior stairway, the wooden hinges on the cupboard doors, all have remained undisturbed. The whole house is typical of a middle class colonial dwelling.

Bibliography:

Wilber, C.P. (compiler) Washington Crossing State Park, New Jersey Division of Forests and Parks Department of Conservation and Development, State of New Jersey, 1931

"House That Once Sheltered Washington's Injured Heroes Still Standing At Crossing" (In part by Dr. Stuart Close, name of newspaper and date of issue could not be ascertained. Clipping in Free Public Library, Trenton)

Field Book and Drawings of Survey

Walter C. Kitt
Supervising Historian

Approved:

SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, A.I.A.
District Officer

Note - See Addenda

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ADDENDUM

The foregoing history is the commonly accepted version told about this house. The facts, however, do not bear this story out. The Mc Konkeys lived on the Pennsylvania side and not on the Jersey side. For the following facts the writer must thank Dr. Carlos E. Godfrey, the keeper of the public records of New Jersey.

Mc Konkey's Ferry was situated at the present village of Washington Crossing, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. The land was taken up by Henry Baker in 1684; Baker established the first ferry there, and it was called Baker's Ferry. This ferry was conveyed by a grandson, Samuel Baker, Jr. to Samuel Mc Konkey on December 5, 1774. The name was changed to Mc Konkey's Ferry. The ferry was sold on March 21, 1777 by Samuel Mc Konkey to Benjamin Taylor and the name was again changed to Taylor's Ferry. It will be known in history, however, as Mc Konkey's Ferry because Washington inscribed it in his order of march.

The New Jersey terminus of Mc Konkey's Ferry was Johnson's Ferry. In the middle of the eighteenth century the land in Hopewell Township, Hunterdon County, extending the same distance along the Delaware River above and below the Mc Konkey side in Pennsylvania, formed part of the plantation owned by Rut Johnson of Somerset County.

By Rut Johnson's will, the property went to his son Garret on August 30, 1748. Garret Johnson's will of February 27, 1768 gave the plantation to Robert and Rut Johnson; Robert receiving the north part and Rut the south part. The plantation

was sold on August 13, 1770 by the high sheriff of Hunterdon County to Abraham Harvey in satisfaction of judgment obtained by Mary Cubberly against the executors of the will of Garret Johnson. The deed was given December 10, 1770. The property passed from Abraham Harvey on November 27, 1778 to his son Moses Harvey. Moses sold two hundred forty-seven and three quarter acres to Samuel Tomlinson on April 1, 1801.

The title is clear from Samuel Tomlinson down to Isidore P. Strittmatter, who in 1922 and '23 sold and conveyed the remaining portion of the original plantation to the Board of Conservation and Development and which now forms the front of Washington Crossing Park.

From authentic source, we find the name of the ferry which operated on this property was Johnson's Ferry. This fact is shown by lessees and by tavern applications submitted annually to the Hunterdon County Court; now in the New Jersey Public Record Office. There are recorded here petitions from Garret Johnson for May, 1761; from Rut Johnson for May, 1766; another from James Slack, May, 1767; another from Richard Slack, May, 1779; and still another from Abraham Harvey, May, 1786.

We know that ferries took the names of the owners of the land, or the operators, or the lessees; moreover with different sets of owners and operators on opposite sides of the river, there was bound to be different names.

The only historic interest connected with the ferry is the fact that Washington and the Continental Army debarked here after crossing

the Delaware River on Christmas night in 1776 when enroute to Trenton. The story told about the so-called Mc Konkey's House applies to the house on the Pennsylvania side. The name Mc Konkey's Ferry House as applied to the structure on the Jersey side is erroneous and due to perversion of facts.

Bibliography:

Godfrey, Carlos E. Washington's De-
barkation at Johnson's Ferry on Christ-
mas night in 1776 Trenton The Trenton
Historical Society, 1932

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